

The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

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DEAR MEMBER,—

I believe that out of the welter of the present something dynamic is struggling to be born. At a deeper level than that of social and political catchwords and ready-made opinions there may be taking place a vital shifting of consciousness—a discovery of new values or rediscovery of forgotten values; something that we do not make or will, but that comes to mankind as a gift through the saving influence of unseen spiritual forces. If this is so, it will manifest itself simultaneously in many different quarters and different forms. We shall discover the presence among us of a number of tendencies slowly gathering volume and uniting with one another until they become a stream powerful enough to change the course of history.

The situation seems to be clarifying in one or two directions.

A CONFLICT OF PRINCIPLES

First, there is a growing recognition of the meaning of the fact that this war is in its essence not a war between sovereign states, but a conflict between irreconcilable conceptions of life. It is, as the President of the United States put it, a “revolutionary” war; or, in the words of the *K.-H. News-Letter*, which has done great service by repeated insistence on this truth, an “international civil war.”

It follows from this that those who support the conception of life for which this country is standing are our friends, no matter where they happen to have been born nor where they are now living. This is a novel idea to most people, but unless it is understood, the meaning of the struggle will be missed and things will go wrong.

Low had an admirable cartoon in the *Evening Standard* of July 19th, in which he depicted on one side of a barbed wire fence the harmless German and Italian enemies of Nazism and Fascism and on the other a strident group of “our own total-minded little Hitlers” with their shouts of “Lock up all foreigners,” “Suppress the Press,” “Death for fool talk,” and so on. In the corner surveying the scene is a small girl who asks her uncle the pertinent question, “Which are the dangerous ones we have to keep behind barbed wire, uncle?”

President Roosevelt said in one of his speeches that ninety per cent. of mankind were in agreement about the kind of world they wanted to live in. That world is certainly not the world of Nazi tyranny. The figure may, as things are, be a rhetorical exaggeration. But, if we stand unequivocally in the eyes of the world for the principles of liberty, toleration, justice and co-operation, which the Nazis deny, multitudes of plain men everywhere, who in their hearts believe in and desire these things, will rally to our side. The issue of the war cannot then be in doubt.

Unequivocally is the point. Recent happenings in this country gave rise to a deep disquiet. It looked as though we were in practice throwing to the winds the values for which we claim to be fighting. Doubts were awakened in the minds of our best friends in other

countries. But last week witnessed a quick and happy recovery. The robust common sense of ordinary people and the ridicule of the Press put an end to the ill-judged attempts to stop rumour and defeatist talk by making everybody a watchman of everybody else. The nation breathed a sigh of relief when the Prime Minister dismissed the silent column to "innocuous desuetude." The absurd prosecutions for trivial remarks are to cease and the sentences already passed will be reviewed. A change of policy in regard to the internment of aliens has been announced, and we shall no longer inflict indiscriminate injustice and hardship on innocent people who are our friends and who desire nothing more than to help us in our struggle.

Having recovered in some measure our sanity we can address ourselves with greater whole-heartedness to waging the war on its double front, spiritual and military. But the lesson needs to be laid to heart. As Mr. J. B. Priestley has said, it is ridiculous to fight the war if everything worth having dies on the way.

A POSITIVE SOCIAL FAITH

A second point at which the issues are becoming clearer is the deepening sense that just because the war is a conflict between different conceptions of life, our political faith needs to have a more positive content. Hitler's plans for a new order in Europe will undoubtedly be drawn in a way to enlist the widest support. The world will want to know what is our alternative. Mere generalities will not suffice. The vital question, more particularly in the minds of youth, is whether we are merely the defenders of an old order, in the assumptions of which they have ceased to believe, or are the adventurers and pioneers of a new age.

An article by Dr. J. L. Hammond in the *Manchester Guardian* of July 16 took as its text a statement in an American journal that if the democracies are merely trying to save something old, they are already beaten. The Fascist Powers grew to strength by playing on the capital weakness of the Western democracies that they lacked a positive, constructive faith, which could inspire men to a passionate devotion, and lived, or rather drifted, from day to day without any clear objective. Hitler saw the necessity of rallying his people by some large and mobilising interest. The strength of Nazi propaganda lies in the fact that, even though it has no constructive solution, it is dealing with real problems.

Hitler's idea of unifying Europe has an attractive power because of its appeal to the imagination. Actually his new order means the spoliation of the occupied countries and the reduction of their peoples to serfdom in the interest of the dominant German race. The only effective answer to his plan for unifying Europe is a recognisably better plan. The liberal nations, as Dr. Hammond says, have to "provide a scheme under which the position of a small nation in Europe would not be that of a pawn in power politics, but that of a people drawing strength from the common resources, material and moral, of the whole of Europe. This involves a new conception of the duties of nations to each other." For this purpose there will be needed a competent international authority armed with extensive economic, social, and educational powers which will attack poverty, disease, and ignorance. The basis for such an enterprise has already been laid in the important enquiry carried out by the League of Nations at the instance of Mr. Bruce, the former Prime Minister of Australia, into the relation of nutrition to health, agriculture, and economic policy. The knowledge is available; what is needed is the will to act.

The bold lead which would transform the situation can be given only by freeing ourselves from the mentality and economic assumptions of the nineteenth century, which have lost their hold over the younger generation. *The Tablet* stated truly in a recent editorial (July 20) that, while the enemy is deficient in ideas, "we, on our part, have been slow to rebut the charge that, as we were the chief beneficiaries of the last century, so we are trying cruelly and artificially to keep it alive when it offers no hope or promise to the young generations of the poor countries."

The Times has been insisting that we must not allow Hitler's challenge to go by default. In a leading article on July 18 it urged that "much harm has been done to our cause, both in Europe and overseas, by the insinuation that we stand for the old order, and that our only aim is to restore the *status quo* in Europe and to maintain it at home. This charge should be emphatically and authoritatively refuted." In an earlier editorial (July 1), which rightly attracted much attention, it insisted that the problem of the new order is social as well as international. "The European house cannot be put in order unless we put our own house in order first. The new order cannot be based on the preservation of privilege, whether the privilege of a country, of a class, or of an individual."

It was just this note that was lacking in the broadcast of Lord Halifax, which in other respects was a magnificent declaration of Christian faith and of the fixed resolve of this country to resist the forces of anti-Christ. Its contagious faith in the principles of freedom has evidently had a powerful effect abroad. But the absence of any explicit recognition that the old order will not suffice deprived it of the kindling power it might otherwise have had. Free men, free nations, a community of nations freely co-operating—these are indeed the pillars of the new order. It is only in the soil of freedom that the things which ennoble human life can grow. But for what purposes are men going to use their freedom? That question has to have a definite answer if there is to be a cause which will command the whole-hearted support of the younger generation. It is dangerous to give ground even for a suspicion that Christianity is bound up with an order of society in which many of that generation have completely lost faith.

What I am trying to convey in this letter is that, while the positive faith which will be an effective answer to the dictatorships has still to be formulated, there is a growing common perception of our need of it. To see a problem clearly is a long step towards finding the remedy. But it is only a first step; and it is even that, only if the perception of our need is more than our own ineffective longing for a better world—if it is the gift of a divine power working in and through and for us. If it is that, we can look to God to complete His work.

THE WAY OF PENITENCE

The New English Weekly, in the editorial notes of which I find each week much that is congenial, suggests in its last issue that, through the struggle with the great lie of Nazism, the British spirit, torpid as it often is, may yet become "manifest once more as the human spirit which cannot deny the liberty of the individual, nor the covenant of social justice, nor even the reverence due to Nature, however it may neglect or sin against them." If that happens, it may yet be found that "the rock of human sanctity stands in the sea where it always stood, in sinful, repentant but yet faithful Albion."

The vital word is "repentant." The gateway to new life, for a nation as well as for an individual, is always through a costly break with what has been wrong. A new order can be brought into existence only at a great price. Until we have faced and accepted that truth we are living in a world of dangerous illusion.

President Roosevelt, in his speech accepting nomination, described the present struggle and choice as that of "religion against Godlessness; the ideal of justice against the practice of force; moral decency versus the firing squad; courage to speak out and act versus the false lullaby of appeasement." That is true, and because of its truth we have to steel our hearts and go through with the business to the end.

But the moment we translate what is a relative difference into an absolute one, the statement becomes untrue, and its untruth can wreck our hopes. What of our *own* Godlessness? In what measure have we achieved social justice? We dare not, in view of

¹ "Those who wish to sample them can obtain a reproduction of recent editorials in a pamphlet entitled *England's Opportunity* (*New English Weekly*, 7 and 8, Rolls Passage, Chancery Lane, E.C.4. 4d. post free.)

our past record, take it for granted that the victory of our arms would mean the triumph of God's purpose. The President's assertions are true only in so far as we unrestingly *make* them true. We can make them true only by an act of national repentance—repentance not merely of our individual sins, nor of particular evils such as intemperance or gambling, but of the fundamental sin of enthroning false values in the heart of the national life.

THE BURMA ROAD

The agreement with Japan regarding the temporary closing of the Burma road came as a shock to many in this country. It was probably as unpalatable to the Government as to many members of Parliament and ordinary citizens. The factors of which account had to be taken are not all known to the public, and judgment must, therefore, remain in suspense.

It is evident, however, that to the moral sense of the ordinary man aggression is the same wherever it is committed. Japanese treatment of the civil population in China has been as ruthless and brutal as that of Germany in Europe—if, indeed, it has not been worse. To condone or assist Japanese aggression would reduce to pretence the moral grounds of our case against Germany, and would alienate, perhaps irrecoverably, the sympathies of the Chinese people. To desert the Chinese in their fight for national existence and liberty could not fail to have a profound effect on the future of Christianity in China. Many Chinese Christians have come to feel that, however little the West may deserve to be called Christian, there is at the heart of its civilisation a core of Christian tradition from which the ideas of freedom, humanity, and justice draw much of their strength. This persuasion, to which the mind of China is at present open, would receive a rude shock if it seemed that our advocacy of these principles was merely a cloak for our own interests.

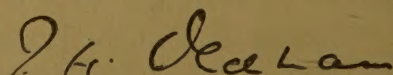
It may be hoped that a temporary inability to defend the principles to which this country is committed does not in any sense imply an abandonment of them, and that an opportunity may occur before long of making this unmistakably plain.

PAYING FOR THE WAR

There is a widespread feeling that the new Budget does not touch the fundamental problems. The real sacrifices which the war demands have still to be faced.

There is no escape from the necessity of largely reducing consumption. This will be tolerable only if necessities are distributed equally, even if incomes are not. The demand of the National Executive of the Labour Party that economies should be imposed equally on all classes and that luxurious expenditure on food should be firmly curtailed by rationing is just. We are a united nation in defending our heritage, and we owe it to one another that the standard of living of the poorest members of the community, which is already too low, is not further reduced.

Yours sincerely,



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